Human rights in the world: Union's activities from 1997 to June 1999. Memorandum and annual report

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PURPOSE : to present the annual Memorandum on the Union·s activities in the field of human rights (1997). CONTENT : the aim of this Memorandum is to keep the European Parliament informed about the activities put into action by the Union in the field of human rights in 1997. The document goes through the Union's actions in all regions of the world, as well as its collaboration with various competent international institutions in the area of human rights, such as the OSCE, the United Nations or the Council of Europe. The Memorandum reveals that, in 1997, the European Union continued to exercise strict vigilance with regard to the situation on human rights in the world. It also adopted several common positions, issued public declarations and took steps in order to oppose violations of human rights in the countries and regions concerned. In Central and South-Eastern Europe, it is mainly the situation in the FYROM which was of greatest concern Two documents were published which aim to ensure respect for human rights, the rule of law and minority rights are conditions for agreed assistance. In Bosnia, the European Union continued to support the High Representative, Mr. Carlos Westendorp, with a view to the implementation of the Dayton/Paris Agreements ; however, serious barriers were the cause of the slowdown in the return of the refugees to Bosnia. Moreover, in the FYROM, the deterioration of the situation concerning the respect of human rights and ethnic minorities drove the Union to suspend and then abolish the autonomous commercial measures with this country. In Central Asia, the most worrying situation is Chechnya where summary trials and public executions were carried out. Furthermore, the Union denounced the random arrests of protesters and the worsening of the repression of members of the opposition in Belarus. As for the Mediterreanean region, the Union closely followed developments in the situation in Algeria while recalling that the fight against terrorism must also respect human rights. In the Middle East, it is mainly the Israeli-Palestinian situation which attracts the Union's attention with the setting up of a European Observatory in 1997 for Human Rights in the region. The information collected, thanks to this new mechanism, resulted in some progress on questions associated with human rights in the two camps. In Asia also, the Union maintained its pressure in favour of respecting human rights, in particular, in China and Afghanistan. In these countries, the Union called for the immediate halt of hostilities in order to avoid having new victims in the country. It is also worth noting that the Council Decision of 24 March 1997 sought the termporary withdrawal of the benefits of the Generalised System of Preferences for not respecting human rights in the country. In Latin America the Union, mainly concerned itself with deepening its relations with each of the countries in the Rio Group. Particular importance was accorder to Mexico with the signature of the Cooperation and Partnership Agreement the firstArticle of which provides that respect for human rights should be a principle element of the Agreement. Lastly, in Africa, the most worrying situation comes from the Great Lakes region. The situation there led the Union to send a Special Convoy (Mr Aldo Ajello) with a view to monitoring the evolution of human rights in the region. The situation remains worrying in the Congo (former Zaire) and Burundi. A Troika was sent to the region so as to explain the Union's position on human rights and the conditions for the granting of aid in the future. No improvement in the human rights situation was observed in Rwanda where reprisal massacres by way of genocide took place throughout 1997. The Union remains concerned about the situation in Nigeria, requiring it to maintain its common position imposing restrictions on the granting of visas to certain categories of Nigerian citizens. The European Union also strongly condemns the military coup d'état in Sierra Leone.